
LEA SELF-ASSESSMENT & IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

GUIDANCE MANUAL

FOR USE WITH LEA SELF-ASSESSMENT VERSION 4

UPDATED 07/30/2015



Public Schools of North Carolina
State Board of Education | Department of Public Instruction | EC Division

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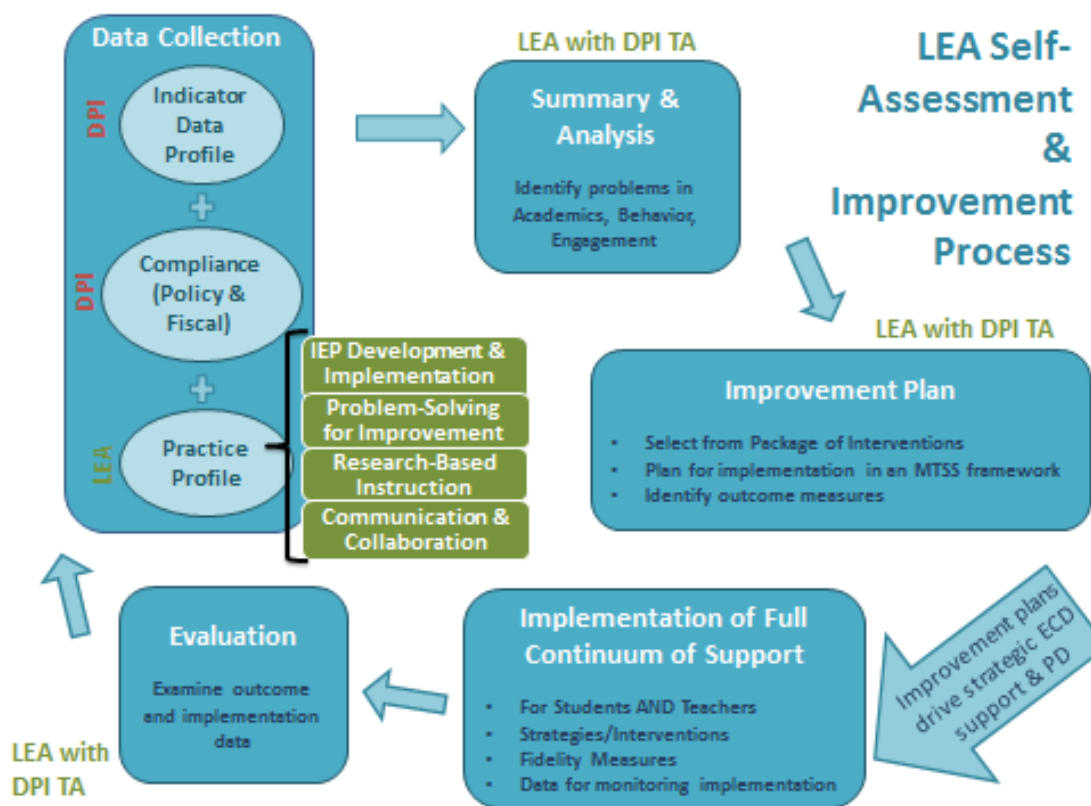
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PURPOSE

The Local Education Agency (LEA) Self-Assessment and Improvement Process was developed to support Results Driven Accountability (RDA) efforts to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. The focus on RDA is not just a state priority, but is also an identified priority for the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

The purpose of this process is to:

- *SUPPORT PROBLEM-SOLVING AND IMPROVEMENT PLANNING:* by providing a structure for collecting data, assessing LEA capacity, and analyzing local processes and outcomes to address the Core Elements of EC provision through the analysis of existing processes and student outcomes.
- *DRIVE DECISION-MAKING AT THE LEA, REGIONAL, AND STATE LEVEL:* by supporting the development of priorities and achievable improvement plans and assisting the Exceptional Children Division (ECD) in providing customized, tiered LEA support
- *BRIDGE IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS:* by aligning State Board of Education goals, Agency initiatives, OSEP requirements, and EC Division Strategic Vision and Core Elements



The LEA Self-Assessment and Improvement Process is designed to be completed by a team in each LEA. Support from ECD regional and state consultants will be provided as LEAs work through the

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assessment and improvement process. While the focus is on the development and improvement of comprehensive exceptional children services, the process acknowledges the critical role of interconnected systems within the LEA by including information about *all* education processes and systems. To collect the best information, LEAs should include representative stakeholders on their team when completing the process. Stakeholders should represent these groups at a minimum:

- Exceptional Children Director or Coordinator
- General Education Leader (e.g., Curriculum and Instruction Director, Department Head, etc.)
- Building Level Administrator
- Parent/Family Member

The team will need members who have skills in these areas:

- Data interpretation
- Knowledge of existing systems and programming
- Problem-solving
- Implementation and systems change

This guidance manual is intended to support and assist LEAs in completing the process by providing instructions, guiding questions, and possible data sources.

During the 2015-16 school year, support for completing the LEA Self-Assessment and Improvement Plan is planned at the regularly scheduled EC Director/Coordinator Regional Meetings. ECD regional and statewide staff will be available to partner with LEAs for discussion, data analysis, consensus-building, and sharing helpful tips and strategies from LEA who participated in the field-testing of the instrument. The expected timeline for this work is reflected below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: LEA Self-Assessment Implementation 2015 - 2016

PROJECT PHASE	STARTING	ENDING	PROJECT PHASE	STARTING	ENDING
OVERVIEW/TIMELINE WEBINAR	8.1.2015	8.31.2015	LEAS FINISH PRACTICE PROFILE; BEGIN SUMMARY & ANALYSIS	1.4.2016	1.29.2016
LEAS COLLECT/REVIEW DATA	8.17.2015	8.31.2015	3 RD REGIONAL MEETINGS: SUMMARY & ANALYSIS	2.1.2016	2.29.2016
1 ST REGIONAL MEETINGS: DATA & PROBLEM-SOLVING	9.1.2015	9.30.2015	LEAS FINISH ANALYSIS; BEGIN IMPROVEMENT PLAN	3.1.2016	4.29.2016
			4 TH REGIONAL MEETINGS: IMPROVEMENT PLAN	5.2.2016	5.31.2016
LEAS FINISH DATA; BEGIN PRACTICE PROFILE	10.1.2015	11.30.2015	LEAS COMPLETE IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND SUBMIT	6.1.2016	7.1.2016
2 ND REGIONAL MEETINGS: PRACTICE PROFILE	12.1.2015	12.22.2015			

DATA COLLECTION

DATA REPORTS

LEA ANNUAL PUBLIC REPORT

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) requires states to report annually to the public on the performance of each local education agency on certain indicators. Each LEA can find their LEA Annual Public Report for Students with Disabilities posted here: <http://www.nccecas.org/apr2013-2014/leareportcards2013-14.html>. The LEA Annual Public Report contains OSEP Indicator data required to be reported annually for individual LEAs as well as composite state data.

SUPPLEMENTAL DATA

For the 2015-2016 school year, each LEA will be able to access supplementary data reports via CECAS and CEDARS by mid-August. These reports will include the most recent data NCDPI can access at the state level. Recorded webinars will be posted to support LEAs in accessing this data. Online access information can be found below.

DATA IN CECAS

Data in these areas can be found in CECAS or through CECAS analytics:

- 5-year cohort graduation rate
- Graduation by disability category
- Graduation by race and disability category
- Graduation by LRE and disability category

To access this data, visit CECAS here: <http://www.nccecas.org/downloads/downloads.html>. Cohort data will be posted in the reference section.

DATA IN CEDARS

These reports will be available on the Table on Contents Dashboard in the Special Education Programs box:

- Proficiency by disability category
- Proficiency by test and disability category
- Proficiency by race and disability category
- Attendance by disability category
- Attendance by race and disability category
- Attendance by gender and disability category
- Attendance by grade and disability category

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ACCESSING CEDARS

If data have not previously been accessed using CEDARS, it may be necessary for someone from the LEA to register for access. The EC Director or Coordinator will need to first determine if someone in the LEA already has access and/or whether direct access for the EC department is needed. The LEA should consider which role should own the responsibility for accessing the data for the LEA Self-Assessment team in a timely manner (EC Director, EC Coordinator, EC Data Manager, LEA Data Personnel, etc.). It is recommended that the responsibility for accessing the data is given to personnel who will be working on the LEA Self-Assessment team. This will ensure that person is part of the ongoing data conversations and, therefore, has an understanding of the data the team has reviewed as well as what the team might need to look at next.

If it is determined that an additional user will need to request access to CEDARS, the steps for registration are as follows:

- Data managers should sign up for access to CEDARS by going to this link: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/cedars/reporting/registration/>
- Users must have an NCID before registering.
- Click the link under Step 2 to begin the registration process.
- One registration is submitted, an approval process takes place at DPI and once approved, you will be notified via email.

Additional information on accessing and using the CEDARS system can be found at:

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/cedars/reporting/documentation/>. Those who already have a CEDARS sign in can proceed to the login page: <https://cedars.ncpublicschools.gov/analytics/>

QUESTIONS ABOUT DATA

Additional data beyond the supplemental reports posted may also be available. Additional data reports may be posted in the Special Education Programs box if requested by LEAs. Questions about accessing data or the CEDARS system should be directed to Kelley Blas. Kelley may be reached at kelley.blas@dpi.nc.gov or 919-807-3967.

CLEAR

When the Exceptional Children Accountability Tracking System (ECATS), the new EC data system comes online, LEAs will be able to access the Comprehensive LEA Report (CLEAR). The CLEAR will be designed to contain Indicator data, as well as other data about students with disabilities that LEAs will need for problem-solving and completing the LEA Self-Assessment and Improvement Plan process. In the meantime, the LEA Annual Public Report and the Supplementary Data Report will be the primary sources provided by the ECD to each LEA. For specific data points within the Practice Profile, suggested data sources and collection methods are provided for data that will be available in the CLEAR in the future.

COMPLIANCE DATA

The LEA Self-Assessment and Improvement Planning process is meant to focus on assessing current practice and assisting with planning for future growth, as other mechanisms exist for ensuring compliance. Review of compliance data as part of the self-assessment process is expected to focus on thinking about how compliance practices support student outcomes. To that end, critical components, guiding questions for consideration, and possible data sources have been identified to support LEAs as they consider interplay of compliance and outcomes.

CORE ELEMENT 1: POLICY COMPLIANCE AND MONITORING

This core element examines how the LEA monitors and ensures compliance with federal and state policies regarding students with disabilities. Because the ECD is federally required to make LEA determinations about LEA policy compliance, this information will be periodically provided to the LEA by NCPDI.

GUIDING QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How does the LEA deliver training to:
 - district and building level administrators;
 - general education staff; and
 - special education service providers?
- How does the LEA determine assess the scope of training (i.e., specific regulations, process or practices)?
- What is the frequency of internal file reviews?
- How does the LEA verify service delivery?
- How does the LEA address areas of deficiency?
- Is there a need to conduct internal file reviews?
- Are parent resources readily available to the public?
- How does the LEA communicate with the public regarding local level dispute resolution strategies?
- Does the LEA have identified staff members to respond to parent calls at the LEA level?
- Does the LEA provide training on conflict resolution strategies to school administrators, special education service providers, etc.?
- Does the LEA engage in early dispute resolution within the first 20 days of a formal state complaint?
- Is there a pattern within the state complaints filed against the LEA?

DATA SOURCES

1.1

- Interview data from Program Compliance Review
- Corrective Action ordered by DPI
- Review of local PD logs and meeting agendas

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1.2

- Student Record Review data from Program Compliance Reviews conducted during the DPI monitoring cycle
- LEA Determination letters
- Monitoring reports

1.3

- Review of LEA website and Parent/Student Handbook
- Review of LEA Resources data and recommendations from Program Compliance Review
- Review of local PD logs/calendars
- Review of state complaints filed and letters of findings

CORE ELEMENT 2: FISCAL MANAGEMENT

This core element examines how the LEA monitors fiscal resources and ensures compliance with federal and state fiscal policies regarding students with disabilities. Because the ECD is required to make LEA determinations about LEA fiscal compliance, this information will be periodically provided to the LEA by NCDPI. Suggested data sources are listed below and a link to the new Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) has also been provided. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs/edgar2008.pdf>

GUIDING QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What policies and procedures are in place in the LEA that address fiscal management?
- Did the LEA meet Maintenance of Fiscal Effort?
- Did the LEA receive any Special Project funds to help support children with disabilities?
- Was corrective action required after the LEA IDEA Fiscal Desk Review or IDEA On-site visit?
- Was a Finance and Business Services Title I audit report completed and was any follow up data required?
- Were the IDEA 611 and 619 grant submission timely and accurate?
- Were mid/end of year expenditure reports and EOY updates completed?

DATA SOURCES

2.1

- Local fiscal policies and departmental procedures
- EC IDEA Fiscal Monitoring Self-Assessment/Desk Review data and reports
- EC IDEA on-site visit report
- Finance and Business Services Title I audit report and follow up data
- Special Programs validation visit reports

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- Child specific special program application Mid/end of year expenditure reports
- IDEA single audits
- Medicaid reports and data

2.2 All items are completed accurately and submitted by due dates, including:

- Grants,
- Applications/reimbursements,
- Budgets,
- and required amendments/supplements.

2.3 Completion of the IDEA Fiscal Monitoring Self-Assessment Checklist and Action Plan for identified area(s) of need.

PRACTICE PROFILE

Practice Profiles are used to operationally define the critical features of an initiative, program, or practice (more information about practice profiles can be found here: <https://unc-fpg-cdi.adobeconnect.com/a992899727/ai-lesson3/>). In this case, the ECD (with significant stakeholder input and rigorous pilot testing) has defined the critical features of the four remaining core elements and has assigned a rubric to implementation variations so that LEAs can assess their progress on implementing the core elements of a comprehensive LEA EC program.

LEAs should complete the Practice Profile by assessing each critical component based on existing data. Brief notes about the data and discussion used to make the determination of rating should be added to the *Documentation and Comments* column to assist readers in understanding the rationale for the rating selected by the LEA. After coming to consensus, the group should add the rating for each item to the *LEA Rating* column.

To assist LEAs in determining the most appropriate rating based on current practice and think about ways to enhance future work, guiding questions and possible data sources are provided. Numerical scores are only meant to provide a way of assessing current practice and future change.

CORE ELEMENT 3: IEP DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

This core element examines the processes the LEA has in place to ensure the development and implementation of appropriate, high quality IEPs and how the LEA monitors outcomes for students with disabilities.

GUIDING QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What are the outcomes for students with disabilities?
- Are the IEPs in your LEA of high quality that ensures FAPE?

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- Are students reaching their IEP goals?
- Does progress monitoring continue after eligibility determination and placement?
- Are students progressing in the general education curriculum?
- Are students making the progress necessary to graduate?
- Once high quality, appropriate IEPs are written, how does your LEA ensure they are implemented as intended?
- How is progress monitoring data used to improve IEPs, implementation, and student outcomes?

DATA SOURCES

3.1: Proficiency for students with disabilities: See Indicator 3.c on the [LEA Annual Public Report](#) or the District Report Card at the [NC School Report Cards site](#)

3.2 & 3.3: ECATS will include the capability of collecting individual student progress data and aggregating that information as part of the CLEAR. Once ECATS is online and data has been entered, LEAs will be able to see this data within the system. Until that time, LEAs should collect this data from a sample of the IEPs in their district (one sampling method is described in the Methodology section of the ECD Program Compliance Review document). It is recommended that LEAs collect this data as they are conducting their internal audits, using the same sampling method and adding an item to the data collection protocol (many LEAs use the [Special Education Student Record Review Protocol](#) developed by the ECD Policy, Monitoring, and Audit Section) where the auditor reviews the progress reports on IEP goals for the record as part of the audit. LEAs could also use data collected in the student outcomes section of the ECD Program Compliance Review to support this item.

3.4: The 5-year cohort graduation rate for students with disabilities is included in the Supplementary Data Report.

3.5: Sources of progress monitoring data; indications in IEPs that if students were not making progress, IEPs were revised, such as changes to frequency or intensity of specially-designed instruction provided.

3.6: Potential data sources include: data collected by LEA compliance monitoring staff during school visits or in the Service Verification section of the ECD Program Compliance Review, walk-throughs conducted by school building administrators, parent concerns logged by the LEA, and complaints that have been filed with the state.

CORE ELEMENT 4: PROBLEM-SOLVING FOR IMPROVEMENT

This core element examines how the LEA collects and uses data to identify potential problems, works toward solutions, plans to implement changes, and continually improves outcomes for students. Because this element relates to processes in the entire LEA, it will be especially helpful to have someone participating on the team during this part of the process that has a high level of familiarity with not only EC data, but also overall LEA data and problem-solving processes.

GUIDING QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What data does your LEA collect? How often?
- Who looks at the data?
- How is this data used to evaluate current practice?
- Does your data set include both fidelity and outcome data?
- How does your LEA use student and teacher data to inform eligibility determination, instructional decision-making, programming, and delivery of services?
- Does your LEA have a common problem-solving model?
- How are problems identified?
- How are implemented solutions monitored over time to determine effectiveness?
- How is data used to determine when the LEA should stop doing ineffective activities?

DATA SOURCES

4.1: Minutes from IEP team meetings that document problem-solving using data (formative and summative data for academic, behavioral, and functional goals) for individual students; work products from problem-solving process

4.2 & 4.3: LEA Supplementary Data Report

4.4: Meeting minutes that document problem-solving using data (process, fidelity, and outcome data); work products from problem-solving process. Types of data that could be used for problem-solving include:

- Formative and summative assessment data for academic, behavioral, and functional goals;
- Progress monitoring and outcome data for academic, behavioral, and functional goals (including CEIS);
- Data from fidelity measures;
- Meeting minutes from problem-solving teams (PLCs, NCSIP Analyses Team, PBIS team, etc.);
- Documentation of problem-solving process used by LEA (TIPS, etc.);
- Other locally collected data (NCSIP Developmental Reviews, SPP/APR data, class size, teacher licensure and retention data, PBIS data, etc.)

CORE ELEMENT 5: RESEARCH-BASED INSTRUCTION AND PRACTICES

This core element examines how the LEA identifies, implements, and monitors research-based instruction and practices.

GUIDING QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How does your LEA evaluate your current instructional practices to identify potential problems? How does your LEA address EC issues in the LEA Strategic Plan?

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- When a problem is identified, what information is used to select an appropriate solution/intervention?
- How does your LEA evaluate the options for research-based interventions and practices? How is the research base evaluated for proposed interventions?
- How do you determine whether the potential program/intervention/instructional approach is a good fit for identified student need (see Hexagon tool)?
- How does the potential method fit with programs and practices already in place (an initiative inventory can be a good place to start identifying all of the currently implemented programs and practices).
- Once a new intervention is selected, how does the LEA plan for its success? How are staff members and students selected to participate in the intervention? How are staff members trained and what follow-up support is provided to staff during implementation?
- How is fidelity of implementation assessed? What data are monitored to assess the health of the implementation?
- How has your LEA planned for sustainability of the initiative across stages? What is the capability of the LEA to support and sustain the selected intervention? How will broad capacity be developed over time?
- How does your LEA document the processes, procedures, and practices that support successful implementation?

DATA SOURCES

Types of data that could be used for evaluating research-based interventions and practices:

- Documentation may include the LEA's procedure for selecting initiatives, practices, and instructional methods (flowcharts, checklists, etc.);
- Methods for evaluating the evidence base for selected initiatives and practices;
- Data about student needs to be addressed (LEA Public Report, Comprehensive Needs Assessment reports, student data about achievement, attendance, behavior, functional performance, transition needs, etc.);
- Implementation Team Rosters;
- [Hexagon Tool](#);
- [Initiative Inventory](#);
- [Communication protocols](#);
- [Implementation/Action Plan](#);
- [Practice Profiles](#);
- [District Capacity Assessment](#);
- Training rosters and coaching logs;
- Program reporting documents (both fidelity and outcome data);
- Fidelity checks;
- Progress monitoring data;
- Outcome Data;
- [Personnel selection criteria](#)

CORE ELEMENT 6: COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

This core element examines how the LEA ensures effective communication (internally and externally, as well as across all levels) and involves all stakeholders in meaningful ways.

GUIDING QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What procedures does your LEA have in place to ensure communication for successful policy and practice transaction?
- How are decisions communicated across levels from your Superintendent and school board members to Directors to school administrators to staff members and families?
- What mechanisms are in place for families, community partners, and staff to communicate concerns to decision-makers?
- What mechanisms are in place to ensure stakeholder concerns are addressed in a timely manner?
- What methods of communication are available?
- How does the LEA encourage stakeholder participation, not only of families, but also of other child-serving agencies and community partners?
- How does your LEA partner with the SEA to improve outcomes for students?
- How does your LEA provide disability awareness, resources, IEP understanding, and information about graduation requirements to families?
- How does your LEA meet stakeholder advisory obligations (NCSIP Steering Committee, Special Education Advisory Council input)?

DATA SOURCES

Data sources for Communication and Collaboration may include:

- Information provided to stakeholders (e.g., newsletters, pamphlets, LEA website/electronic resources);
- LEA Resources section in ECD Program Compliance Review
- Stakeholder meeting invitations, agendas, and rosters;
- Methods for soliciting stakeholder feedback: surveys, forums, hotlines, etc.;
- Training agendas and rosters;
- Indicator 8 survey data on parent involvement;
- MOAs with community agencies;
- Initiative implementation evidence (MOAs, meeting agendas, implementation plans, fidelity checks, outcome data, etc.);
- LEA participation in SEA stakeholder committees;
- Participation in DAC activities at regional level;
- Letters/reports between SEA/LEA (e.g., visits, evaluations, consultations, etc.);
- Attendance/ participation in regional meetings;
- Conference documentation;
- Professional Development agendas and rosters (SEA);

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- Special Education Advisory Council roster, agenda, minutes;
- Rosters, agendas, minutes from other district implementation teams or workgroups such as MTSS, NCSIP, PBIS, etc.

PRACTICE PROFILE SUMMARY

The Practice Profile Summary provides an overview of the ratings selected by the LEA for each of the critical components, and summarizes the scores for each Core Element. The *Total* for each Core Element represents the sum of the points for that Core Element, while the *Percentage* of each Core Element represents the percentage of possible points for that Core Element. For example, if an LEA's total score for Core Element 6: Communication and Collaboration was 4, then the percentage would be 50% (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Sample excerpt from Practice Profile Summary

Core Element 6: Communication and Collaboration	
6.1 LEA has effective vertical and horizontal communication processes in place to support policy and practice.	1
6.2 LEA facilitates meaningful parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities (e.g., rights and procedural safeguards, specific disability information, instructional practices, etc.).	2
6.3 LEA partners with community stakeholders (including preschool, mental health, etc.) to enhance service provision to students and families	0
6.4 LEA collaborates with SEA to support program and initiative improvement	1
<i>Core Element 6 Total</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Core Element 6 Percentage</i>	<i>50%</i>

Scores from the 2015-16 school year (the first year of statewide administration) will serve as baseline data. As the ECD collects these data from LEAs over the next several years, targets for each area may be established. Data will also be used to inform customized ECD support for LEAs.

SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

Once data has been collected, LEA teams must summarize and analyze results to identify problems and their root cause(s) to ensure effective improvement strategies can be implemented. The LEA must consider all of the data collected: information about student achievement, compliance, processes, problem-solving, implementation, and communication. The Analysis section of the LEA Self-Assessment provides questions to assist LEAs in considering the implications of the data they have collected and synthesized. The goal of the LEA Self-Assessment is identify and prioritize targeted improvement areas across a 3-year timeline.

IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Once the analysis has been completed and the area for improvement has been identified, the LEA will document the planned improvement strategies on the Improvement Plan. The Improvement Plan should be designed to span three years and include intermittent targets for growth. In subsequent years, the LEA will continuously collect and analyze data, submit updates to NCDPI to document progress on action items, and adjust interventions to ensure selected desired outcomes for students with disabilities are met.

LEAs may choose the format in which the plan is submitted. For some LEAs, the best choice may be to integrate their EC goals and plans in their LEA Strategic Plan. Others may prefer to develop a separate document using an established LEA template. A sample template is also provided on the Improvement Plan tab in the LEA Self-Assessment tool. No matter the format selected, the LEA plan should be pasted into the Improvement Tab and should include the following:

- A statement of the problem the LEA intends to address that includes (what, when, where, who, why)
- Goal and actions or interventions the LEA intends to take to address the identified problem
- The person/position responsible for that action/intervention
- The timeline for completing the action/intervention
- The method for measuring fidelity of the action/intervention
- The method for measuring the effectiveness of the action/intervention
- Documentation of the outcome of the action/intervention and any next steps

LEA teams should create Improvement Plans with more detailed goals for the first year, as well as goals that the LEA plans to address in the second and third years of implementation. Once implementation begins in the second year, LEAs will update the Improvement Plan based on their implementation and outcome data. This will allow LEAs to modify action items as needed.

SUBMISSION

The 2015-2016 LEA Self-Assessment & Improvement Plan should be submitted using Version 4 of the tool, available for download here:

<http://ncimplementationscience.ncdpi.wikispaces.net/LEA+Self-Assessment>. LEAs should document their information in the provided spaces on each of these tabs:

- Policy & Fiscal Compliance,
- Practice Profile,
- Analysis, and
- Improvement Plan.

LEAs are not expected to submit supporting data or additional documents. When information has been completed, LEAs are asked to submit the LEA Self-Assessment & Improvement Plan spreadsheet tool using the following naming convention: LEASA.2015-16.*LEAname*, inserting their LEA name. This spreadsheet should be sent electronically via email to Heather Reynolds at heather.reynolds@dpi.nc.gov by July 1, 2016.

APPENDIX 1: FREQUENTLY USED TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- CEIS: Coordinated Early Intervening Services
- CLEAR: Comprehensive LEA Report (intended to be included in ECATS)
- DAC: Directors Advisory Council
- ECATS: Exceptional Children Accountability Tracking System (EC data system proposed to replace CECAS)
- ECD: Exceptional Children Division
- FAPE: Free and Appropriate Public Education
- LEA: Local Education Agency
- MOA: Memorandum of Agreement
- MTSS: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support
- NCSIP: North Carolina State Improvement Project
- NCDPI: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
- OSEP: Office of Special Education Programs
- PBIS: Positive Behavior Intervention and Support
- PLCs: Professional Learning Communities
- RDA: Results Driven Accountability
- SEA: State Education Agency
- SPP/APR: State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report
- TIPS: Team Initiated Problem Solving